

Spartans Stun Owasso, 43-42, for 10th Gold Ball

By Ron Holt

EDMOND – In a Class 6A-1 state championship game featuring big plays by both teams from start to overtime finish here last Friday night, Bixby's Spartans turned in the final big play.

Senior workhorse linebacker-quarterback Cooper Parker scored on a four-yard touchdown run in overtime and then broke away from congestion to find daylight outside on a two-point conversion run as the giddy Spartans stunned top-ranked and unbeaten Owasso, 43-42, for the program's 10th state championship in the past 11 seasons.

Bixby, 11-2, overcame an early 14-0 deficit and an athletic, powerful opponent in winning the most thrilling, dramatic and entertaining game in Class 6A-1 history. Bixby's core values, mental toughness and culture were on display at crunch time.

"I'm exhausted," said Bixby's 15th-year head coach Loren Montgomery afterward, likely echoing the sentiments of 6,843 fans at Chad Richison Stadium on the University of Central Oklahoma's campus. It was the Spartans' most exciting, high scoring state championship game ending since 2019 when BHS scored later, followed by a forced fumble, in defeating Stillwater, 40-36, in the 6A-II title game.

When the opportunity came for Bixby to get back into contention with Owasso in the final minutes, the Spartans took advantage. Trailing Owasso 35-28, the opportunity arose when the Rams opted to go for a first down instead of punting on fourth-and-one at their own 28-yard line.

OHS senior running back Jaylon Moll was stuffed for a two-yard loss by Bixby's defense, led by junior lineman Hector Garcia and junior linebacker Trey McGlothlin who were joined by junior linebacker Cord Nolan, senior defensive back Brooks Dixon and junior DB Emory Snyder.

"We knew they were going to score, and we knew there would be times we would fall behind and we'd have to fight back and that's what we did," said Nolan, who led Bixby's defensive effort with 13 total tackles, six solo, one sack and one forced fumble.

"It was a war for all four quarters and into overtime. I'm so proud of all our guys," he added. "We matured so much this year, we remained level-headed and stayed in the game."

Bixby wasted little time responding after the dramatic defensive stop. Two plays later, junior quarterback Carson Kirby lofted a pass which was caught over the shoulder by junior standout Braeden Presley in the corner of the end zone for a 24-yard touchdown. Senior Bradley Thao kicked the extra point tying the game at 35-all.

The game-tying grab capped off a brilliant performance by Presley, who was credited with seven pass receptions for 126 yards and one TD while also rushing twice for eight yards. He ended with 134 all-purpose yards. He also recorded five tackles as a cornerback.

Owasso (12-1) only advanced from its own 35-yard line to its 49 before punting the ball away with 14 seconds left before the two teams headed to overtime.

The Rams went on offense first in overtime, scoring from four yards out on third down by junior Jayden Hall while Noah Hill kicked the extra point giving OHS a 42-35 lead.

Two runs by Kirby moved BHS from the 10-yard line to the four where Parker scored off tackle to set up the gritty coaching decision. Bixby opted to go for the two-point conversion. Parker ran behind sophomore tackle Kaeden Penny before scoring uncontested outside for the game-winner.

"I was supposed to hit inside but they crashed inside, and I headed outside," said Parker, who led BHS in rushing with 80 yards on 20 carries and three TDs while also recording six tackles, four unassisted. "At first, it wasn't open but when I saw that daylight it was the best feeling ever. I absolutely wanted to go for two, I told coach I was getting into the end zone.

"Our guys didn't quit. They were kind of bullying us at first but the only way to beat a bully is to fight back. Owasso is a really good team so to win by one in overtime in the state championship ... I wouldn't have it any other way. It feels better than the last one," he said with a smile.

After forcing a three-and-out on Bixby's first offensive possession of the game, Owasso jumped out front 7-0 after a 72-yard touchdown sprint by Hall, a 5-11, 205-pound junior running back, with 10:12 left in the first quarter.

Owasso's lead grew to 14-0 at the 1:51 mark of the first frame when sophomore quarterback Drew Frankenfield passed to H-back Colton Sudbeck for a 19-yard touchdown.

Bixby's offense got untracked on its next possession, driving 63 yards in eight plays for a two-yard TD run by Parker with 11:08 showing in the second quarter. Thao kicked the conversion. The drive was highlighted by a 42-yard pass from Kirby to Presley to Owasso's 15-yard line.

The Spartans used a five-yard scoring run by Kirby and a point-after kick by Thao to tie the game 14-14 with 6:06 left before halftime. Bixby covered 55 yards in 10 plays during the drive.

Key plays in that drive were a 15-yard pass from Kirby to junior Catcher DeHart and a 13-yard pass from Kirby to Presley – both on third down.

The Rams again erupted as Frankenfield and Hill combined for a 67-yard touchdown pass with Hill kicking the conversion for a 21-14 OHS lead with 4:46 left in the second stanza. Owasso went 71 yards in three plays for the go-ahead TD.

Bixby - which played much of the game without standout senior wide receiver Blake Hogshooter, who suffered a hip injury - answered with an 80-yard scoring drive in seven plays, ending with a four-yard TD run by Parker and a conversion kick by Thao, tying the game at 21-all with 2:04 left in the first half.

A 43-yard pass from Kirby to Presley and a face mask penalty on the play highlighted the drive.

Opening the third quarter, Owasso went on a 13-play, 56-yard drive to the Bixby 24-yard line, taking 5:39 off the clock. Again, the Spartan defense resisted as junior defensive back Tyler Wright intercepted a Frankenfield pass, returning it eight yards. It was Wright's second interception this season.

"We saw they were going to a diamond set, and it didn't look like the guy was coming to block me, so I just moved up and intercepted it," said Wright, who was also credited with three tackles, all solos. "We knew it was going to be a dogfight from the beginning to the end.

"We knew we'd have to fight, or we'd lose the game, so we kept on punching and that's what happens. It's unbelievable ... I can't really say how it feels right now," he said.

Seven plays later, Bixby turned that turnover into points as Kirby passed to freshman running back Brian 'BJ' Jones for a 49-yard touchdown pass giving the Spartans a 28-21 lead with 3:53 left in the third quarter. Snyder delivered a key block allowing Jones to get past the last obstacle.

A 10-yard pass from Kirby to Nathan Gonzales and a four-yard run by Parker, both on third downs, kept the drive alive.

"It was like a wheel route and my quarterback got me the ball and I got out in space and then I just followed a block and scored," said the speedy Jones of his dramatic contribution. "These coaches know what they're doing, they're great at it because we win a lot of championships because of them.

"They took a freshman who got hurt (broken ankle) his eighth-grade year and helped me become the man I am today."

The back-and-forth battle continued as Owasso went 80 yards in seven plays to tie the game at 28-all after Jaylon Moll bolted 49 yards for a TD and Hill kicked the extra point with 32 seconds left in the third quarter.

OHS regained the lead on its next possession after a 44-yard TD burst by Hall, completing a 90-yard, 11-play drive, to give the Rams a 35-28 lead with 5:03 remaining in the game. Owasso converted three third-down attempts to keep the drive alive.

Bixby had to punt on its next possession, setting up the game-deciding series of events that led to the Spartans tying the game late and forcing overtime where BHS prevailed with the successful two-point conversion run.

"We were talking in our office this morning what we'd do if we were in that type of situation," coach Montgomery said. "We saw a team last night in the Sulphur and Lincoln Christian game that went for two in that situation. I thought it was a good call.

“We thought a lot about that situation. We talked about different plays we might run in that situation but that’s not what we talked about, but the complexion of the game affects that decision We had one of our very best players running behind our best offensive lineman,” he added.

Bixby’s two quarterback system was effective as it has been all season. Parker led BHS in rushing while Kirby was 19-of-25 passing for 229 yards and two touchdowns. He also ran for 14 yards and one score. “Owasso is a well-coached team, we gave it our all for four quarters,” Kirby said surrounded by Jubilant Spartan players and excited fans. “I told the guys all I week I couldn’t wait to go to war with them and tonight we did.

“The way we’ve progressed from the start of the year to now is incredible. I’m super proud of all my guys. It’s unbelievable ... this was one I won’t forget,” he said.

The list of Spartan players making big plays on offense, defense and special teams would be lengthy. The incomparable Bixby coaching staff had the Spartans well prepared for a long night.

“I’m super proud of our guys ... what a group effort by our coaches. We had players making big plays, players getting fourth down stops,” coach Montgomery said. “Hogshooter got hurt earlier in the game and coaches were having to get other guys ready. I’m just proud of everybody.

“We had big plays everywhere at critical times. Obviously, Braeden was amazing, and I thought Carson was great. Cooper Parker had big plays, and we had a bunch of key receptions moving chains. We hit the freshman BJ Jones, and he made a play.

“This game was indicative of this year,” he noted. “The game was up and down, we got down early, hung in there and made some plays and got some momentum back. It wasn’t a perfect game but none of them are ... the biggest thing is that our guys understood their roles and responsibilities and did them without hesitation.

“It doesn’t mean we won every battle but at least we were going to go down swinging,” he added.

For a team returning only five starters from last season, the team’s progression from the 40-21 loss at Owasso in the season opener to hoisting another gold ball at the state championship game was a testament to the players’ commitment and the leadership of the incomparable, veteran coaching staff.

NOTABLES – Winning seven consecutive state championships in the largest classification is a record, tying the Spartan program in the state with eight-man powerhouse Morrison. Bixby won its third straight Class 6A-1 state crown. ... Amazingly, Bixby has won 85 of its last 88 games, improved its playoff record since 2014 to 32-1 and raised the program’s overall playoff record to 67-37. ... With 10 state championships, Bixby is tied statewide with Thomas and likely with Tipton, which is favored to win its Class C state title game this week. Ada’s 19 state championships are the state’s best. If Carl Albert wins the Class 5A state crown this weekend the Titans will have 19 state crowns. ... Owasso amassed 338 rushing yards against Bixby, led by Jayden Hall’s 202 yards and three touchdowns and Jaylon Moll’s 132 yards and one TD. Ram junior receiver Tah’Kari Bethel, who victimized Bixby with two TD pass receptions and a 99-yard kickoff return in the first meeting, finished last Friday with two catches for 16 yards. ... Defensively, Bixby was led by Nolan’s 13 tackles followed by Hector Garcia’s nine tackles while Brooks Dixon, Trey McGlothlin, Cooper Parker and Nathan Hobbs each recorded six tackles. Spartan defensive back Emory Snyder intercepted a deflected Owasso pass and returned it four yards in the first quarter for the first of two Spartan interceptions against Owasso, the only turnovers of the game. It was Snyder’s team-leading sixth interception this season. ... Owasso ended with 451 yards of total offense while Bixby ended with 330. Each team had 63 offensive plays. ... Bixby senior kicker Bradley Thao played football for the first time this season. He was successful on all crucial extra-point kicks last Friday. “From the first Owasso game to this Owasso game I had gotten more confident,” Thao said. “I was in awe the first day because it was hard, but I just kept working ... you have to do what the coaches say. Since it’s my first year kicking and to be a state champion is amazing.” ... Junior Tyler Wright was asked if he was looking forward to next year: “Yes, but tomorrow I’ve got a basketball game.” He scored 18 points and had six rebounds in a loss to Lincoln Christian in the boys’ third place game of the Bixby Invitational. ... Bixby captains against Owasso were Cooper Parker, Cord Nolan, Braeden Presley and Blake Hogshooter.

Bixby 43, Owasso 42 (OT)

FIRST QUARTER

OHS – Jayden Hall 72 run (Noah Hill kick), 10:12

OHS – Colton Sudbeck 19 pass from Drew Frankenfield (Hill kick), 1:51

SECOND QUARTER

BHS – Cooper Parker 2 run (Bradley Thao kick), 11:08

BHS – Carson Kirby 5 run (Thao kick), 6:06

OHS – Hill 67 pass from Frankenfield (Hill kick), 4:46

BHS – Parker 4 run (Thao kick), 2:04

THIRD QUARTER

BHS – BJ Jones 49 pass from Kirby (Thao kick), 3:53

OHS – Jaylon Moll 49 run (Hill kick), :32

FOURTH QUARTER

OHS – Hall 44 run (Hill kick), 5:03

BHS – Braeden Presley 24 pass from Kirby (Thao kick), 1:51

OVERTIME

OHS – Hall 4 run (Hill kick)

BHS – Parker 4 run (Parker run)